

THE TEMPLE TANK

And

Other Poems

BY

GOVINDA KRISHNA CHETTUR



BASEL MISSION BOOKSHOP MANGALORE
INDIA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SOUNDS AND IMAGES

(Verse)

Erskine Macdonald, London

GUMATARAYA*

(Verse)

THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE*

(Verse)

THE GHOST CITY*

(Short Stories)

THE LAST ENCHANTMENT*

(Recollections of Oxford)

* Published by the B. M. Bookshop, Mangalore

TO
MY WIFE

I am indebted to the Editors of the various Indian Periodicals in which these poems first appeared for kind permission to reprint them in book-form.

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THE TEMPLE TANK

Here, by this pool, where herons stand and wait,
In quietness I cannot imitate :
Where Dawn and Sunset fling with reckless hand
A bounty that I cannot understand :
Where little things of fur and claw and scale,
With careless scorn put me beyond the pale,
And the rapt silence broken by their stir
Wraps closer round the restless worshipper :

Here, to this place of wonderment and peace,
With hurried steps, impatient, ill-at-ease,
I come to shed this ceaseless strife that mars
Even the beauty of the changeless stars :
And I return, undaunted, calm, and slow,
Careless of how I move, or where I go,
With benediction of this solitude,
Not understanding God, but—*understood*.

THE SENTINELS

A stone's throw from the porch there stand
Six casuarinas hand in hand,
Lining the gravel to the gate,
Like sentinels, erect, sedate.

They take the morning's kiss of gold
Ere yet pale night her mists hath rolled,
And when the sun lifts up his head
Proudly they stand be-diamonded,
Before their sovereign lord, each one
Acknowledging dominion.

But see, allegiance wavers now,
As to the winds, each feathered bough
Bends and sways in humble greeting,
While a whisper, faint, retreating,
Breathes of secrets none have heard,

But all their joyous hearts have stirred,
For now in them the birds begin
To swing and shake with merry din,
Charging each slender twig, each spray,
With sweetest serenade of day.

Then through the livelong hours to tease
The wind with his inconstancies,
Or watch the heavy clouds go by
On lumbering feet across the sky,
Or feel the sudden swish of rain,
Slant past again, and yet again,
Until the fading twilight brings
The sadness of unmortal things,
And all the stars rush forth to see
A greater glory on each tree,
Beholding there the radiance

Of living fire leap and dance,
Ten million sparks that fill the night
With endless wonder and delight.

A stone's throw from the porch there stand
Six casuarinas hand in hand:
Six sentinels of Beauty, they,
That line the quick ecstatic way,
O'er which she lightly trips to give
To the lost soul and fugitive,
Glimpses in sudden lights that flit
Of glory in the Infinite.

THE LAW

Thou art the Law:
All things that are,
Man, mountain, dragon-fly, or star,
Divinely appointed move
Within the orbit of Thy love:
For in Thine eyes,
Nought lives, nought dies,
But of Thy graciousness,
And in Thy seeing is there great nor less:

Therefore, take heart of grace, I said:
Living or dead,
Joyous, or broken on the whirling wheel,
Thou dost reveal
In all our passioning the heart of things,
And even though least of all the things that be
Equal we stand before the praise of Thee.
ONE with the Spirit of Eternity.

LOVE'S PASSING

I

I walked upon the dappled grass,
With my fair love by my side,
And all the world was green and glad,
As glad as a summer bride.

II

I walked upon the dappled grass,
The round, round moon above,
And none was there more sweet or blithe,
None sweeter than my love.

III

I walked upon the selfsame grass,
There was not moon nor sun,
And only the stars beheld us kiss,
The kiss that made us one

IV

I walked upon the dappled grass,
And dreamed of days that were,
Of a comely lad and a comely lass,
O, a lass so sweet and fair!

V

I walked upon the dappled grass,
Beneath the round, round moon,
And sighed to think that love should pass,
That love should pass so soon!

VI

I walked upon the selfsame grass,
The sun and the moon had set,
But all my heart was sad, alas,
For my heart could not forget!

SANCTUARY

I

Come walk with me, and I will lead you where
The world's unquiet shall have no access,
But Beauty's self shall seek and find you there,
And peace shall fold you in forgetfulness,
And the old music of the unchanging sea
Shall there restore your soul's tranquillity.

II

Onward o'er heaving upland we shall make,
Green-clothed with glory of rich summer showers,
And, breasting loveliness with each step we take,
Forget unwisdom of unhappy hours,
Till from yon summit you shall see unrolled
A sweeter wisdom than you dreamed of old

III

Lo, now we stand on this o'er-topping hill,
The valleys fall about our very feet,
And fold on fold the ridged earth slopes, until,
Far off, the ocean, in a golden sheet,
Prepares e'en now to bear the exhausted sun,
Flushed with his toils ere his work be done.

IV

And here we stand as the last spears of Day
Rush swiftly overhead, and all the sky,
With crimson stain, turns wanly from the fray,
Leaving the field to Night, that suddenly
Ranging her army of stars leads fleetly on,
Heedless of rout before the spears of Dawn.

V

Hark, now the murmurs of the ocean steal
 Through the hushed darkness, like a soft caress
 Blown on the night air to the stars that wheel
 Above our heads in ordered loveliness,
 While twinkling lights in the dim vales appear
 And faint sounds travel faintly to the ear.

VI

Here, on this height, removed from toil and tears,
 Man's life becomes a little, little thing,
 And vain the eager striving of his years,
 And vain the folly of his suffering.
 O Littleness, that shames the heart of Peace,
 Now, less than nought appear thy victories!

VII

Here, silence broods upon Eternity!
The heart of the majestic Universe
Beats here through all our being, and we see
With inner vision of true worshippers,
Beyond our petty dreams and pettier strife,
The vast design, immutable, of Life. . . .

VIII

And peace shall go with us when we return,
And be an armour about our hearts, to hold
Inviolat and pure the dreams that burn,
Transmuting life's base metal into gold;
Until endurance fail us and we flee
For Grace renewed unto this Sanctuary.

Because, just then, I'd nothing else to do,
I laid my chin upon the study table,
And watched a crack where the tough wood had split;
And presently, there tumbled out of it,
A little beetle striped in green and blue.
Quickly he ran as fast as he was able
To the far end; then stopped, as though his wit,
Had failed him there: and then as quickly flew,
With show of confidence incomparable,
Along the very edge, till seeing me there,
He stopped again; then peeps uneasy stole,
Down o'er the edge, which to him was world's end,
And then at me again that seemed no friend;
Next, longingly, across the table, where,
His home showed safe. He knew not for his soul
What next to do: to run back, or extend
Enquiry farther?—Then in sheer despair,
He gave it up, and scuttled to his hole.

PEACOCKS

I

Peacocks are so beautiful,
Peacocks are so grand,
There's never a one can better them
In all this wondrous land.

II

Peacocks are so stately,
Peacocks are so proud,
Though some I know are prouder still,
Yet not so well endowed.

III

Peacocks have a hundred eyes,
But evil every one,
As traitor-hearted Argus found
Ere the day's work was done.

IV

And peacocks are so brazen,
They have nor shame nor fear,
And the harsh voice that peacocks have
Grates on the rudest ear.

V

But peacocks in great gardens,
On marble terraces,
Lend pomp and passion, beauty,
And beauty, more than these.

VI

For peacocks are so beautiful,
Peacocks are so grand,
There's never a one can better them
In all this wondrous land.

FLIGHT

Over the corn,
That the bright arcs mow,
Over the hills,
Where the strong winds blow,
Over the clouds,
That sweep and go:

Under the stars,
In their shadowy light,
Under the sun,
And its flaming might,
Under the moon,
So frail and white:

Betwixt desire,
And its swift surcease:

Earth, and its sorrows,
And Heaven's release:
Wrapped in the quiet
Of God's own peace!

TRIOLETS

HE

If absence makes the heart grow fonder,

Sweet, my love, I wish you gone;

For I shall love you better, yonder,

If absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Cheer up, sweet, what makes you ponder?

This is a truth I've hit upon :

If absence makes the heart grow fonder,

Sweet, my love, I wish you gone.

SHE

He's a fool who yearns to barter
 The present for increase of bliss.
Love too often proves a Tartar—
He's a fool who yearns to barter,
And I've no mind to make a martyr,
 While there's time, come, let us kiss.
He's a fool who yearns to barter
 The present for increase of bliss.

NOCTURNE

The sun has slipped behind the hill,
And all the listening world is still,
Listening low and listening high,
To hear the moon's step in the sky.

Ah, here she comes in silver lace,
And treading with divinest grace
Her old accustomed pathway through
The smiles of all her courtier crew.
See, there, Orion bends to her,
Devout as any worshipper :
And there, the Twins, with sheepish eye,
Seek each other to outvie
In homage to the Queen of heaven :
While, overhead, the *ris'his* seven,
Seem with gaze benign and hoar
On her their blessings to outpour.

*What fantasies the mind invest
With mingled lore of East and West
When Love to Beauty yields her will!*

But soft! The night is all athrill!
A hush of rapture fills the air,
While, yonder, like an act of prayer,
The columned palms, their silvery girth,
Raise unto heaven from the earth:
And in the shimmering haze afar,
Beneath the steadfast northern star,
The everlasting hills, that teach
In silence more than any speech,
Patience and strength and fortitude,
Beyond us in our sternest mood.

Hark! Now, the night wind stirs and wakes,

And over the distant waters makes
A trembling glory : now it moves
Within the shaded cocoanut groves,
In perfume wafted from its wings,
And whisper of forgotten things.

Dear God, what beauteous paths are Thine!
Now, all our being made divine,
Resurgent flows back unto Thee
Borne on this flood of ecstacy,
Knowing in moments such as these
Fulfilment of our destinies.

THE COW

Across the railway line, the sun
Shone brightly on the gleaming corn,
While, overhead, birds wheeled and spun,
And sang *tweet-tweet*.
Oh, all the world was gay that morn,
Most wondrous gay and sweet.

That day the Mail-train threw a cow
Half-crushed and bleeding down the bank;
And there it lay, — I know not how,
I know not why —
While all the day, with roar and clank,
The trains went shrieking by.

A hundred jackals came that night
To the live feast that cow supplied,
And screamed and barked and howled delight,

Until the rain,
Came down as though the floodgates wide
Had opened once again.

But no man cared, or stopped to see—
So great life's little cares are grown,
A dumb beast's mortal agony
Is soon forgot.—
To cruel hearts of wood, of stone,
Alas, it mattered not!

In rose and gold it dawned next day,
The birds again sang *tweet-a-tweet*,
And all the world once more was gay,
And sweet and fair.
Lord, how *could* the world be sweet
With that cow bleeding there?—

The little bird that makes its nest,
 In yonder cashew's topmost crest,
 Has surely lost his heart to you,
 For it can find nought else to do,
 But all the day, most plaintively,
 To say, "Chocee—Chocee—Chocee."

And sometimes when you hear that call,
 Most sad, most sweet, most musical,
 You turn your pretty head and say,
 "The little bird wants me today,
 Hear how it cries repeatedly,
 'Chocee, Chocee, Chocee, Chocee'."

And then we smile with eyes of love,
 And search the cashew's green above,
 To find upon a bending spray

The love-sick warbler lightly sway,
And, even as we turn to see,
Again, he cries, "Chochee—Chochee!"

But sometimes when you are not here,
His cry falls shrilly on my ear;
It makes me sad, for then his voice
That bids me vainly to rejoice,
Reminds me all too poignantly,
That you are gone, Chochee, Chochee.

I think I love that little bird,
Who makes such music of that word,
And I can never hear that call,
Most sweet, most sad, most magical,
But my heart leaps exultantly,
For love of you, Chochee, Chochee.

BEAUTY

Beauty wanders everywhere,
Light as laughter, free as air :
Through lush meadow she doth make
Leaving glory in her wake :
Hill and valley her to greet
Spread in blossom 'neath her feet,
While the waters thrill to song,
As she gaily trips along

Then her glorious smile behold,
In yonder sunset sky of gold,
And in the deep impassioned night
See her twinkling footprints bright !
Very earth and heaven vie
To seem most fair in Beauty's eye.

Heart of maid ! Here Beauty lingers :
Seek her gently, touch her fingers

Now she trembles, and her eyes
Meet the ground in shy surmise.
Love-lit are those fires you see
Veiled in bashful modesty:
Gaze into them, read them true,
Know the joy that waits for you

Lo, the miracle is past!
Beauty changed to Love at last,
Holds you closely: kiss her eyes,
If you would be passion-wise.
Heart of Beauty now shall be
Clothed in Love's sweet mystery,
And now shall Love in Beauty's guise
Fill your heart with wild emprise.

Though she wander free as air,
Light as laughter everywhere,

She shall make her home with you,
Find you loyal, tender, true,
Bring you freedom, joy, and praise,
And crown with glory all your days.

Love, in a tender moment, raised her head,
 And watched a floating seraph smile.
 "Two foolish mortals long for you" she said,
 "Sweet, make them glad awhile."

And you, in haste, obeying Love's command,
 Reckless of mortal pain or strife,
 Came with Love's smiling gifts in either hand,
 O life of my life of my life!

FIREFLIES

A myriad fireflies fill the night
With shifting sparks of delicate light,
And every tree that looms without
Is freighted with this elfin rout,
All lighted up like ships at sea,
A bright and merry company.
And yonder, where the waters still,
Sleep beneath the quiet hill,
Their urgent gleams are multiplied,
Reflected in the darkling tide.
Sometimes a fallen star affords
Less light than that a firefly hoards,
And sometimes the unwary eye
May search in vain the puzzled sky
For some new planet newly seen,
And know it but a firefly's sheen!

So let the fancies rove afield,
And let the secret spaces yield
Unto the mind's imaginings,
And all the stars, new-decked with wings,
Shall leap from space to light our dreams
With witching store of faery beams,
And from their ordered courses turn,
A livelier freedom here to learn.
Here shall Orion hunt no more,
And here the Dog shall go before,
The Pole-star move before his time
Even over the vertic prime,
The Twins shall now no more be twins,
Castor and Pollux, for their sins,
And all the Plough be disarranged,
Leaving nothing there unchanged. . . .

See how they flitter, leap, and pass
Into the lamplight on the grass,
That, sweeping from my herded room,
Cleaves a broad passage through the gloom
A myriad stars have vanished there,
Upon that stream of sudden glare :
A myriad stars are now as nought
Within that brightly lighted plot :
How many morals may not be
Drawn from this philosophy?

But drowsy eyelids call for sleep,
And this dull argument must keep.
So let the busy lamp be blown,
And lay your wearied labours down.
Still, still, the darkness comes not thence
But with its proud magnificence !

As, when the sun falls out of sight,
Uncounted fires leap to sight,
So, on the walls, and in the room,
Uncounted fires light the gloom,
Glimmer and glower everywhere,
Beneath the bed, upon the chair

Ah well, these pretty fancies run
Half way to sleep, ere it be won!
Nor are they lost within the maze:
Only through other eyes you gaze,
Dreaming perchance of faery fry,
And branched`d lightnings in the sky.

BLACK-LEAD

Made of what wood,
How shaped, how perfected,
Nor from what mines the lead,
I have not lore to tell.
This only know I well,
That as I write,
Labouring day and night
With thoughts elate,
This whiteness delicate
Loseth its lustre, and is dimmed and soiled;
And all my thoughts wherewith I toiled,
Scrawled, scored, and under-scored,
A piteous hoard
Of vain imaginings

Yet, even so, I thought,
Are we that labour here

Through strange unlovely days,
And difficult hard ways,
God handling us to some all-glorious end;
And when we faint or fall,
Or wandering, stray beyond recall,
As I, even I, erase
The toil of days,
Setting to work once more,
So will He wipe our score
Of sin away, and graciously
Begin anew upon this Mystery.



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SOUNDS AND IMAGES

BY G. K. CHETTUR

Opinions

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